

Laura Kelly

Laura Kelly (born January 24, 1950) is an American politician serving as the 48th governor of Kansas since 2019. A member of the Democratic Party, she represented the 18th district in the Kansas Senate from 2005 to 2019.^[1] Kelly ran for governor in the 2018 election and defeated the Republican nominee, Kris Kobach.^[2]

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Early life

Kelly was born in New York City to a military family that moved often and was stationed overseas. She studied at Bradley University, earning a Bachelor of Science in psychology, and at Indiana University, earning a Master of Science in therapeutic recreation.^[3] Kelly was the executive director of the Kansas Recreation and Park Association.

Early political career

Laura Kelly



48th Governor of Kansas

Incumbent

Assumed office

January 14, 2019

Lieutenant Lynn Rogers

Preceded by Jeff Colyer

Member of the Kansas Senate from the 18th district

In office

January 10, 2005 – January 14, 2019

Preceded by Dave Jackson

Succeeded by Vic Miller

Personal details

Born January 24, 1950
New York City, New York, U.S.

Political party Democratic

Spouse(s) Ted Daughety (m. 1979)

Children 2

Residence Cedar Crest

Education Bradley University (BS)
Indiana University

Kelly was elected to the Kansas Senate in November 2004, later serving as Minority Whip.^[4] In 2007, she was asked to serve as the Ranking Minority member of the Kansas Ways and Means Committee. Kelly helped to establish the Early Childhood Development Block Grants program in the State of Kansas.^[5]

	Bloomington (MS)
Website	Government website (https://governor.kansas.gov/)

In late 2009 Kelly briefly considered a run for Kansas's 2nd congressional district.^[6] During the 2011–2012 legislative sessions, she served as the Assistant Minority Leader of the Kansas Senate.^[7]

Governor of Kansas

Election

On December 15, 2017, Kelly announced her intention to run for governor of Kansas. In the Democratic primary she ran against former mayor of Wichita [Carl Brewer](#) and former Kansas Secretary of Agriculture [Josh Svaty](#).^{[8][9]}

On May 24, 2018, Kelly announced State Senator Lynn Rogers as her running mate.^[10] On August 7, she defeated Brewer and Svaty, receiving 51.5% of the vote.^{[11][12]} On November 6, Kelly defeated the Republican nominee, Secretary of State Kris Kobach, receiving 47.8% of the vote.^{[13][14]}

Campaign

Kelly was endorsed by former Kansas Governor and U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services [Kathleen Sebelius](#).^[15] She was also endorsed by 28 current or former Republican government officials, including Kansas Governor Bill Graves; former State Senator, Lt. Governor and U.S. Senator [Sheila Frahm](#), Lt. Gov. Gary Sherrer, Insurance Commissioner [Sandy Praeger](#), Senate President [Dick Bond](#), Senate President [Dave Kerr](#), Senate Vice President [John Vratil](#), Senate Majority Leaders [Tim Emert](#) and [Lana Oleen](#); Senators [Barbara Allen](#), [David Wysong](#), [Wint Winter, Jr.](#), [Pete Brungardt](#), [Ruth Teichman](#), [Barbara Bollier](#), [Audrey Langworthy](#), [Terrie Huntington](#), [Bob VanCrum](#), and [Alicia Salisbury](#); Representatives [JoAnn Pottorff](#), [Ginger Barr](#), [Jim Yonally](#), [Jim Lowther](#), [Fred Lorentz](#), and Representative and Republican Party Chairperson [Rochelle Chronister](#); Republican National Delegate [Don Johnston](#); and Representatives [Joy Koesten](#) and [Charles Roth](#).^{[16][17]}

Graves said, "Laura Kelly is the only Democrat I have ever endorsed for public office. And the reason I'm doing that now is because I believe so much is at stake in the state of Kansas. I have known Laura for over 30 years. She has all the qualities and all the capabilities that we are looking for to lead the state during this difficult time and to reestablish the state to what it once was. ... Laura has integrity, and I know she will bring Kansans together regardless of party to solve problems."^[15] Former Republican state senator [Tim Owens](#) was the campaign treasurer for Kansas independent candidate [Greg Orman](#), but he stepped down from that post on October 30 and endorsed Kelly, believing only she could beat Kobach.^[18]

Kelly described her candidacy as aimed at reversing the fiscal, educational and other "disasters" of [Sam Brownback](#)'s governance. She characterized her opponent, who had been noted for his broad disenfranchisement of voters and legal strategies against immigrants, as "Sam Brownback on steroids".^[19]

Cabinet

Office	Incumbent
Lieutenant Governor	Lynn Rogers
Adjutant General	Lee Tafanelli
Secretary of Administration	DeAngela Burns-Wallace
Secretary of Agriculture	Mike Beam
Secretary of Commerce	David Toland
Secretary of Corrections	Jeff Zmuda
Secretary of Health and Environment	Lee Norman
Superintendent of the Highway Patrol	Mark Bruce
Secretary of Human Services	Laura Howard
Secretary of Labor	Ryan Wright (interim)
Secretary of Revenue	Mark Beshears (interim)
Secretary of Transportation	Julie Lorenz (interim)
Secretary of Wildlife and Parks	Brad Loveless

Tenure and political positions

Budget and economic issues

Kelly was critical of the "experimental" Kansas budget of her predecessor Sam Brownback, which led to cuts in schools, roads, and public safety. She would like to reverse those changes and pointed out that after there were major budget shortages she led a bipartisan effort to successfully balance the budget without increasing taxes.^{[20][21]}

In 2019, Kelly vetoed two Republican bills that would have cut state income taxes in Kansas.^[21] She said that the state could not afford the cuts,^[21] and that the Republican bill, which would have cut revenues by an estimated \$245 million over a three-year period, would have precipitated a "senseless fiscal crisis" and created a budget deficit.^[22] Kelly's decision, as well as higher-than-expected state revenue intakes, led to the state beginning its 2020 budget year with \$1.1 billion in cash reserves.^[21] She sought to use some of the reserves to pay down debt and make payments to the state pension system.^[23]

Healthcare

As governor, Kelly pushed the Republican-controlled Kansas Legislature to accept the Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act,^[24] to provide health care coverage to up to 150,000 Kansans.^[25] A Medicaid expansion plan had passed the Kansas Legislature in 2017, but Brownback vetoed it.^[25] In January 2020, after years of Republican opposition, Kelly struck a bipartisan compromise deal with Republican Senate Majority Leader Jim Denning that made Kansas the 38th state to accept the Medicaid expansion.^[25] Under the agreement, on January 1, 2021, Medicaid coverage will be expanded to Kansas residents earning up to 138% of the federal poverty level.^[25]

Kelly has also supported reforming KanCare so that more citizens have access to health insurance.^[20]

Coronavirus responses

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States, Kelly, like other governors, took steps to halt the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which causes coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). She declared a state of emergency on March 12 following the state's first COVID-19 death,^[26] and issued a 60-day ban on public gatherings of 50 or more people and a moratorium on utility shutoffs on March 16.^[27] On March 18, citing the unprecedented crisis, Kelly directed the end to all in-person K-12 classes for the remainder of the school year, making Kansas the first state to take that step.^[28] On March 23, to combat the virus's spread, she limited public gatherings to ten people.^[29] On March 28, amid increasing deaths and illnesses, Kelly issued a "stay at home" order that directed all residents to remain at home, except for travel for essential work, essential business (such as traveling to obtain medical care or groceries), and outdoor exercise with social distancing measures.^[30] Almost two dozen states had already issued similar orders, and almost 75% of Kansas's population were already affected by similar orders from local orders, since 25 Kansas counties, including the most populous ones, already had a stay-at-home order in place.^[30] Kelly strongly criticized the Trump administration's slow response to the crisis and the federal failure to provide Kansas and other states with adequate supplies of personal protective equipment (such as masks, gloves, and gowns) and testing kits.^[31]

Because Kelly's orders on public gatherings applied to Easter Sunday celebrations in churches, the Republican-majority Legislative Coordinating Council (LCC), a group of leaders of the Kansas Legislature, voted to revoke her order on a 5–2 party-line vote on April 9, 2020, asserting that the order violated the free exercise of religion.^{[32][33][34]} Republican Attorney General Derek Schmidt opposed Kelly's order, issuing a memorandum calling it a violation of the Kansas state law, and urged law enforcement not to enforce it.^[32] Kelly called this "shockingly irresponsible";^[32] at the time, there had been more than a thousand confirmed COVID-19 cases, and dozens of confirmed COVID-19 deaths, in Kansas.^[34] and of 11 identified sources of contagion, three had come from recent religious gatherings.^[35] She challenged the LCC's decision in the Kansas Supreme Court. Following an expedited oral argument (conducted remotely via Zoom teleconference), the state Supreme Court unanimously reinstated Kelly's orders, concluding that her executive order was valid and that the LCC lacked the authority to overturn it.^{[36][37][38][39]}

Human services

Kelly combined the Department of Children and Family Services with the Department of Aging and Disability Services into a consolidated, integrated Department of Human Services.^[40]

In January 2020, Kelly called for major changes to the Osawatomie State Hospital, the long-troubled state psychiatric hospital that has faced scrutiny from federal regulators over security, safety, and treatment lapses. She has supported a plan for state funding for mental health crisis centers in the state.^[41]

School funding

Kelly has stated that she would like to ensure Kansas schools are funded and focus on improving the performance of Kansas students to be competitive with other parts of the country. For example, she would address the statewide teacher shortage and improve pay for educators. She would also like to expand early childhood programs and increase options for students pursuing higher education.^[20]

Social issues

In her first official act as governor, Kelly signed an executive order reinstating the employment discrimination protections for LGBT state workers that Governor Sam Brownback had eliminated in 2015.^[42]

Kelly opposed a Republican proposed anti-abortion amendment to the Kansas Constitution in early 2020, saying it would return Kansas to the "dark ages." Amid acrimonious debate, the state House fell four votes short of the two-thirds majority required to put it on the state ballot.^[43]

Personal life

Kelly has been married to physician Ted Daughety, a specialist in pulmonary and sleep disorders, since 1979. They moved to Topeka in 1986. They have two adult daughters, Kathleen and Molly Daughety.^[19]

Kelly is Catholic.^[44]

Electoral history

Kansas gubernatorial Democratic primary, 2018				
Party	Candidate	Votes	%	±
<u>Democratic</u>	<u>Laura Kelly</u>	79,301	51.5%	
<u>Democratic</u>	<u>Carl Brewer</u>	30,885	20.1%	
<u>Democratic</u>	<u>Josh Svaty</u>	26,890	17.5%	
<u>Democratic</u>	<u>Arden Andersen</u>	12,915	8.4%	
<u>Democratic</u>	<u>Jack Bergeson</u>	3,874	2.5%	
Majority		48,416	31.4%	
Turnout		153,865		

[45]

Kansas Gubernatorial election, 2018				
Party	Candidate	Votes	%	±
<u>Democratic</u>	<u>Laura Kelly</u>	489,337	47.8%	
<u>Republican</u>	<u>Kris Kobach</u>	443,346	43.3%	
<u>Independent</u>	<u>Greg Orman</u>	66,163	6.5%	
<u>Libertarian</u>	<u>Jeff Caldwell</u>	18,898	1.8%	
<u>Independent</u>	<u>Rick Kloos</u>	6,232	0.6%	
Majority		45,991	4.50%	
Turnout		1,023,976		
Democratic gain from Republican		Swing	+1.7%	

[46]

Kansas Senate 18th district election, 2016^[47]

Party	Candidate	Votes	%
Democratic	Laura Kelly (incumbent)	15,007	51.6
<u>Republican</u>	Dave Jackson	14,076	48.4
Total votes		29,083	100.0
<u>Democratic hold</u>			

Kansas Senate 18th district election, 2012^[48]

Party	Candidate	Votes	%
Democratic	Laura Kelly (incumbent)	14,813	51.7
<u>Republican</u>	Dick Barta	13,833	48.3
Total votes		28,646	100.0
<u>Democratic hold</u>			

Kansas Senate 18th district election, 2008^[49]

Party	Candidate	Votes	%
Democratic	Laura Kelly (incumbent)	18,009	58.1
<u>Republican</u>	James Zeller	12,959	41.8
Total votes		30,968	100.0
<u>Democratic hold</u>			

Kansas Senate 18th district election, 2004^{[50][51]}**Primary election**

Party	Candidate	Votes	%
Democratic	Laura Kelly	4,559	71.8
<u>Democratic</u>	D. Kent Hurn	1,793	28.2
Total votes		6,352	100.0

General election

Democratic	Laura Kelly	15,388	50.1
<u>Republican</u>	Dave Jackson (incumbent)	15,290	49.9
Total votes		30,678	100.0
<u>Democratic gain from Republican</u>			

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External links

- **Governor Laura Kelly** (<https://governor.kansas.gov>) government website
- **Laura Kelly** (<https://www.laurakellyforkansas.com/>) campaign website
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- **Profile** (<https://www.votesmart.org/candidate/34496>) at **Vote Smart**
- *Follow the Money* - Laura Kelly
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- Appearances (<https://www.c-span.org/person/?laurakelly>) on C-SPAN

Kansas Senate		
Preceded by Dave Jackson	Member of the Kansas Senate from the 18th district 2005–2019	Succeeded by Vic Miller
Party political offices		
Preceded by Paul Davis	Democratic nominee for Governor of Kansas 2018	Most recent
Political offices		
Preceded by Jeff Colyer	Governor of Kansas 2019–present	Incumbent
U.S. order of precedence (ceremonial)		
Preceded by Mike Pence <i>as Vice President</i>	Order of Precedence of the United States Within Kansas	Succeeded by Mayor of city in which event is held
		Succeeded by Otherwise Nancy Pelosi <i>as Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives</i>
Preceded by Kate Brown <i>as Governor of Oregon</i>	Order of Precedence of the United States Outside Kansas	Succeeded by Jim Justice <i>as Governor of West Virginia</i>

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